

Focus ON READING

Vocabulary

READING
COMPREHENSION

My Brother Sam Is Dead

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ACTIVATE PRIOR KNOWLEDGE

Reproducible Activities

Focus Your Knowledge

The American Revolutionary War (1775–1783) was an eight-year conflict. When it was over, the thirteen former colonies had separated from their mother country, England, and had created the republic of the United States of America. This was a long, hard struggle, during which many thousands of people—from both England and the colonies—were killed or wounded.

- Look at a map of the United States. Find the thirteen states that comprised the original thirteen colonies: Massachusetts (which included Maine), Connecticut, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia. What do you notice about their locations? What do you know about why these colonies were established? Who were their first settlers?
- Now look at the map of the colonies. Find Boston. Why do you think that Boston was one of the most important cities in colonial America?
- Now focus on New York. Where is the city of New York located? Why do you think that this was another very important city in colonial America?
- Find the Hudson River. What do you notice about its location in relation to the former New England colonies? Where does the Hudson River begin and end? Why did the colonists find this river so useful?
- Now think about the American colonists who lived during the Revolutionary War. From what country did most of these colonists—or their parents or their grandparents—come? How do you think this would have affected their feelings, their loyalties, and their actions during the war?



Focus Your Reading

Questions to Think About

The following questions will help you understand the meaning of what you read. You do not have to write out the answers to these questions. Instead, look at them before you begin reading, and think about them while you are reading.

1. How does Sam's arrival change the atmosphere in the tavern?

2. What are the narrator's feelings about his brother, Sam? How does the author show these feelings to the reader?

3. What sort of relationship do Sam and his father seem to have?

4. What role does religion play in the life of the narrator and his community as a whole?

5. What is the importance of the Brown Bess to different members of the family?

Check Your Understanding

Multiple Choice

Circle the letter of the best answer to each question.

- When Sam arrives home at the beginning of the book, his family has not seen him since when?
 - his last birthday
 - Christmas
 - Easter
- What does Sam say that the Minutemen have done?
 - They have beaten the British.
 - They have been beaten by the British.
 - They marched out of Boston the day before.
- What does Mother do after Sam enters the tavern?
 - She begins to cry.
 - She serves him some dinner.
 - She asks him who fired the first shot.
- What does Father call the Lobsterbacks?
 - the Governor's Second Foot Guard
 - Patriots
 - the soldiers of the King
- Who does Father say is speaking treason in his house?
 - Mr. Beach
 - one of the farmers in the tavern
 - Sam
- How old is Sam at the beginning of the story?
 - 14
 - 16
 - 18
- What is the Brown Bess?
 - the family's best milking cow
 - the wagon that Father drives
 - the family's gun
- What strange sound does the narrator hear after Father tells Sam to leave the house?
 - Father cleaning the gun
 - Father pounding the table
 - Father crying
- What side are most of the people in Redding Ridge on when the story begins?
 - the Tory side
 - the Papist side
 - the Patriot side
- Where does Tim tell his father he is going after church?
 - to become a soldier
 - to Tom Warrups's hut
 - to help Jerry Sanford

Deepen Your Understanding

Setting is the time and place in which a story happens. An author can show the setting of a story in many different ways: by giving physical descriptions of objects in the environment, by mentioning real events from history that are supposed to be happening at the time of the story, and even by describing the atmosphere or “feeling” of a place and time.

How do the authors of *My Brother Sam Is Dead* reveal the setting? Consider all the different ways in which they have placed the story in time and space, giving specific examples from the text.

Focus Your Reading

Questions to Think About

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1. At this point, how is the war affecting Tim and his family in their daily lives?
2. How does the family handle Sam's being away?
3. Why does Sam come back to Redding? What does this show about his feelings for his family?
4. How does Tim's relationship with Sam begin to change?
5. What role does Betsy Read play in the story?

Check Your Understanding

Multiple Choice

Circle the letter of the best answer to each question.

1. What does Tim say about life in Redding when the war begins?
 - a. There are men marching and drilling in town.
 - b. Life just seems normal.
 - c. There are some small battles nearby.
2. Why isn't Father supposed to have *Rivington's Gazette*?
 - a. It is published by Patriots, whom he does not support.
 - b. Mother thinks that reading the paper makes him too angry.
 - c. It is illegal.
3. What does Tim say about being the son of a tavern keeper?
 - a. It is better than being a farmer's son.
 - b. It is worse than being a farmer's son.
 - c. It is easier than going to college.
4. What does Betsy Read ask Tim one day in September?
 - a. if he will help her steal his father's gun
 - b. whether he can smuggle some food and drink to Sam
 - c. whether he would tell his father if Sam came back to visit
5. When does Sam return to Redding for the first time after fighting with his father?
 - a. in November 1775
 - b. in April 1775
 - c. in August 1775
6. Who demands that Father turn in his gun?
 - a. a Patriot soldier
 - b. Colonel Read
 - c. Tom Warrups
7. Where does Tim run when Father gets cut on the cheek?
 - a. to the church
 - b. to Colonel Read's house
 - c. to Tom Warrups's hut
8. What happens when Sam grabs the muzzle of the gun from Tim?
 - a. Tim tries to fire the gun.
 - b. Sam gets cut.
 - c. The gun goes off by accident.
9. Why does Sam say that he's not supposed to be in Redding?
 - a. because he is supposed to be in Danbury buying cattle
 - b. because he was ordered to Fort Ticonderoga by Captain Champion
 - c. because the Connecticut General Assembly has made it illegal for Patriot soldiers to come through the town
10. What does Sam say when Tim asks if he has ever killed anyone?
 - a. that he has shot one enemy soldier
 - b. that he has not done any fighting yet
 - c. that he is too cowardly to shoot anyone

Deepen Your Understanding

Character is the combination of qualities or traits that make someone an individual. While people often share many common qualities, no two people on earth have exactly the same character.

Using specific examples from the book, describe the character of Tim. How does he feel and act within his family and his community? How does he seem to react to authority figures? How does he compare himself with others, particularly Sam and Betsy? Give as complete a description as possible based on your reading so far.

Then give your opinion of Tim. Is he someone you would like to know? Does he remind you of yourself in some ways—or of someone you know?

Focus Your Reading

Questions to Think About

The following questions will help you understand the meaning of what you read. You do not have to write out the answers to these questions. Instead, look at them before you begin reading, and think about them while you are reading.

1. How is the war beginning to affect the Meeker family and other inhabitants of Redding?
2. In what ways does Tim feel torn between the Loyalist side and the Patriot side?
3. How is Tim beginning to realize that “growing up” is not always as wonderful as one imagines as a young child?
4. What role does Tom Warrups play in the story?
5. What role does Mr. Meeker play?

Check Your Understanding

Multiple Choice

Circle the letter of the best answer to each question.

1. According to Tim, what is a real problem in the winter of 1776?
 - a. the number of Rebel soldiers who drank at the tavern
 - b. the fighting between Patriot and Loyalist troops in Redding
 - c. the shortage of food
2. Up to now, how have Tim and his family mostly learned about the war?
 - a. the newspaper and visitors to the tavern
 - b. letters from Sam and Mr. Heron
 - c. Mr. Heron and visiting soldiers
3. What does Tim say about who is winning the war?
 - a. He is sure that the Patriots are winning.
 - b. He is sure that the Loyalists are winning.
 - c. He says it is hard to tell.
4. Why did Mr. Heron have to leave the Connecticut General Assembly?
 - a. because he owned a black slave
 - b. because he was a Tory
 - c. because he was a spy
5. What would Sam learn to do if he apprenticed himself to Mr. Heron?
 - a. ciphering
 - b. surveying
 - c. building construction
6. Why doesn't Tom Warrups sit down in the tavern?
 - a. because there are not enough chairs
 - b. because he does not believe in drinking
 - c. because he is an Indian
7. What sacrifice does Father say he has already made to the war?
 - a. He has lost a son.
 - b. He has lost a great deal of business.
 - c. He has lost some cattle to the soldiers.
8. What does Father say about Mr. Heron's business letters?
 - a. They are very important.
 - b. They are not really business letters.
 - c. They will help Tim get ahead in life.
9. What does Tim do as he walks to Mr. Heron's house in the morning?
 - a. silently recites a psalm
 - b. whispers a prayer that he won't get caught
 - c. whistles "Yankee Doodle"
10. What does Betsy say will happen if Tim delivers the letter?
 - a. The Patriots will never win the war.
 - b. Sam will be killed.
 - c. Tim will be put in jail.